

COMMUTER BONUS PLUS

Why offer Commuter Bonus Plus to employees?

Commuter Bonus Plus offers a transportation subsidy to encourage employees to commute by carpool, or by walking or bicycling. Participating employers buy Commuter Bonus Plus vouchers from Metro — in the form of bank-style checks — for a minimum of \$5 each, and give them to employees who carpool, walk or bike to work. Some employers also use the vouchers to encourage employees to telecommute.

Employees use the vouchers as full or partial payment for items related to their alternative commute such as gasoline, automotive services, walking shoes, bicycle equipment, locker room facilities, or roadside service.

The Commuter Bonus Plus program is the only known voucher program of its kind in the country. Participation in the program has grown steadily since its introduction in 1995. Currently, more than 120 Puget Sound area employers participate. A recent, comprehensive program analysis showed that the Commuter Bonus Plus program was “primarily responsible” for encouraging a significant number of commuters to shift from driving alone to work, to carpooling, walking or bicycling.

What are the benefits of Commuter Bonus Plus?

To Employers:

- promotes the alternative commute mode best suited to the worksite;
- offers a more visible and tangible benefit than cash subsidies;
- rewards alternative commuters, such as bicyclists or walkers, often difficult to recognize in traditional transit subsidy programs;
- increases potential group of employees interested in alternative commuting;
- guarantees money spent will directly support alternative commute methods;
- offers an attractive employee recruitment and retention benefit;
- allows innovative company bonuses, incentives or company contest prizes;
- permits equity of transportation benefits offered to alternative commuters.

To Employees:

- rewards diverse alternative commute behaviors;
- reduces commuting expenses with lower priced goods and services.

How does Commuter Bonus Plus help meet CTR goals?

For worksites affected by the CTR (Commute Trip Reduction) law, Commuter Bonus Plus encourages the use of several ridesharing commute modes. Employees leave their cars at home more often, reducing the number of single occupancy vehicles (SOV) travelling to the worksite daily.

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What are favorable conditions for using this product?

Commuter Bonus Plus works best when:

- access to transit service near the worksite is limited;
- companies need to promote other transportation subsidy options to encourage employees to use alternative commute modes, and provide incentives to those who carpool, bike or walk to work;
- sites have amenities and policies conducive to carpooling, biking or walking (sidewalks, showers, lockers, bike racks or preferred carpool parking);

How much does it cost?

Commuter Bonus Plus vouchers are available in any whole dollar denomination (\$5 minimum) and are valid for thirteen months from the date of issue. Employers choose the denominations and number of vouchers to buy.

Answers to Commonly Asked Questions

Q. What ensures that vouchers are used appropriately?

A. Vouchers include language clearly defining their use. Employees can be required by the employer to agree to use vouchers appropriately, in order to receive them.

Q. How do employees qualify to receive vouchers?

A. Employers determine the criteria for qualifying to receive a voucher. Most companies require employees to use an “alternative” mode for at least 50% of their commute trips.

Q. How do employees use Commuter Bonus Plus vouchers?

A. Employees take vouchers to a participating retail or service outlet and apply them toward the price of commute-related goods and services. Current retail outlets include. Refer to voucher for complete, up-to-date retail outlet list.

Q. What laws govern Commuter Bonus Plus vouchers?

A. Subsidies for carpooling, walking and bicycling are currently taxable benefits. Refer to Metro’s Commute Expense Tax Issues Q&A for more details on taxable benefits.

Q. How does an employer buy vouchers? And what if a Commuter Bonus Plus voucher is lost or stolen?

A. Employers send payment via corporate check or wire transfer to the Commuter Bonus office at Metro. Once purchased, vouchers cannot be replaced.

Q. What if employees have not used vouchers before the expiration date?

A. Employers exchange expired vouchers for new ones. An employer representative should send expired vouchers to the Commuter Bonus Fulfillment Office.

Q. Must an employer subsidize all three modes (carpool, bicycle, walk) ?

A. No. An employer needn’t subsidize all commute modes, just the modes of choice.